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ABSTRACT

The importance of the building administrator's leadership role in improving a reading program is stressed in this paper. Five major areas of responsibility for the building administrator in developing a successful reading program are delineated. The first area of responsibility is working with teachers and includes supervision of instruction, inservice activities, and tapping individual teaching strengths within the building. Working with pupils is the second major area of responsibility, part of which is knowing the school community. Creating a building atmosphere which reflects the importance of reading is the third area of responsibility. The fourth area of responsibility is to provide leadership in establishing building policies which will provide directions and influence reading instruction. The final area of responsibility is public relations, the involvement of parents and the community in the educational process. (TO)

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THE BUILDING ADMINISTRATOR AND THE READING PROGRAM

James G. Howell

We have had many research projects with considerable interest in and discussion about the teacher factor in any successful reading program. We know that the best way to teach reading is with a dedicated, perceptive teacher who teaches "the child" rather than a method. This position paper has been developed to stress the importance of the building administrator's leadership role in improving a reading program.

A successful reading program should address itself to ten areas of concern.

1. Beginning reading
2. Independence in word recognition skills
3. Vocabulary development
4. Use of audio-visual aids
5. Provisions for individual differences
6. Richness and variety of teaching materials
7. Learning activities in study-type reading
8. Fostering interest in and through reading
9. Individual evaluation of all important skills of reading
10. Provisions for the retarded reader

These areas of concern are not all inclusive but they provide a foundation for developing reading skills and a base for wider reading as the child advances through levels of maturity. The question posed at this point is: "What is the building administrator's influence, either directly or indirectly, on the ten areas listed above?" Please keep this question in mind as I expand for you five major areas of responsibility for the building administrator in the role as an instructional leader. In my

opinion and from personal observations of successful building reading programs, I can vouch for the importance of each. There is a significant relationship between the principal's leadership role in these five areas of responsibilities and a successful reading program.

The first area of responsibility I shall refer to as working with teachers. For purposes of discussion, this area of responsibility may be subdivided into these categories: Supervision of instruction
inservice activities
tapping individual teaching strengths within the building.

Perhaps, one of the most difficult tasks for the building administrator is supervision of instruction. There is probably no set of specific rules one can offer which will guarantee success. The personality of the building principal and the ability to keep open lines of communication are key factors. There are some general guidelines that we can consider in assuming this responsibility.

Somehow or other the principal must get across to the staff the idea that his major function in the school is to help them be more effective teachers. Almost every effort is dedicated to that end. The principal can do many things to allow this to happen. He must study staff members carefully to learn their interests, ideals, personalities, reactions to suggestions and relative sensitivity to criticism (even if it is labed "constructive"). A feeling of mutual trust, confidence, understanding, sympathy and enthusiasm must be fostered as a basis for acceptable and effective supervisory techniques.

Supervision of instruction is not done in a vacuum but rather is continuous and implies principal availability to the staff as much as possible. All staff members must not only feel free to come to the principal with their problems, but ample opportunity must be provided for this important contact. The principal who administers a school with an "open-door" philosophy is in a much better position to achieve effective supervision of instruction.

Personal experience seems to indicate that it is best to refrain from critizing methods and procedures used by a teacher unless others can be suggested. It has likewise proved valuable to focus the attention of both the teacher and principal on the pupils and their problems rather than on the teacher. In effect, this accomplishes the same thing without being directly critical. There are times, however, when the principal must be specific about personal factors affecting the teacher's work in reading.

It is not an easy task to treat such a large and timely topic as inservice activities in a few summary statements. If at all possible, provision for inservice should be made in response to needs that are recognized by at least a majority of staff members. In some schools there is a staff committee to which suggestions are channeled. The principal may submit suggestions to the same group. In other schools, suggestions may go directly to the principal. Regardless of where the impetus originates, it is the principal's responsibility to set up the machinery that will permit inservice programs to function. They may be part of regular staff meetings or meetings specifically designated for such activities. In

either case, outside consultants or central staff personnel may assist building staff in their efforts to find solutions to their problems.

Reading offers endless topics for such inservice activities. Any of the areas of concern mentioned earlier will provide topics of emphasis. We have found that Right-to-Read needs assessment provide valuable baseline information from which to identify and plan future inservice activities.

Very little needs to be said about the importance of drawing on individual teacher strengths as a mode for improving reading instruction. It takes only a time lapse of a few years for the building administrator to be out of touch with the realities of classroom teaching and learning. Thus drawing on your master teachers in reading as models of instruction can be an effective supervisory technique. However, there are certain pitfalls for "no man is a prophet in his own land."

The second area of responsibility is in "working with pupils." Most successful administrators have achieved competency in this area. The administrator who knows the school community and especially the pupils can expect to meet with acceptance and receive the cooperation necessary for a good instructional program.

An important consideration for the successful administrator is to recognize and foster individual worth of pupils. Especially, in larger attendance centers it is easy to lose pupil identity. The building principals who knows pupils as individuals is in a much better position to counsel and encourage. The so-called "average" pupil is the one we must concentrate upon to know as an individual. We need to think

of our pupils as more than cumulative records or as pupil permanent record cards.

Creating a building atmosphere is another important responsibility of the building administrator. If the reading program is to become one of accomplishment, the building atmosphere must reflect its importance. This can be achieved through a variety of techniques. One of the most effective is to have colorful bulletin boards which highlight reading and language arts related activities. These may be provided by charts and materials showing reading development from grade to grade; attractive book jackets, and posters illustrating the reader's ideas gained through reading. Life-size characters from books made from paper-maché, construction paper, or wire-supported paper may be exhibited. Special school assemblies or programs with book themes may be scheduled. Visits of authors to schools have been effective in promoting an interest in reading. Book fairs, exhibits and book weeks are always stimulating and effective. Commercialism should be kept at a minimum. School librarians are resources to tap in stimulating children's interest in reading. - Your public school librarian is usually willing to help, if there is no public school librarian -

Good administrators will use every opportunity to increase awareness of reading and to provide leadership which results in improved reading skill achievement. Slogans supporting the "our school" or "we're glad you're here" concept and involves all professional personnel in a team effort can be a contributing factor in creating a good building atmosphere. We have seen excellent participation and improved attitudes toward reading with "Sustained - Silent - Reading" programs. Administrative

support and leadership are key factors in the success of this program of total building involvement in silent reading.

A fourth area of responsibility is to provide leadership in establishing some clear-cut building policies which will provide some directions and influence reading instruction. The days of the "2 x 4" teachers are fading into oblivion - - (your "2 x 4" teachers are those individuals who are locked within the two covers of basal readers and the four walls of the classroom). These clear-cut policies will tend to speed the day when your classrooms are staffed with dedicated teachers who teach the child rather than a program. Time permits me to mention only two areas that in my opinion need clear-cut building policies.

FIRST, the principal must develop with the staff a policy on the use of basal readers. This policy is usually associated with supplemental materials and enrichment readers. Unless the staff understands the conditions under which basal and supplemental materials are to be used, misunderstanding, partial chaos, poor intrastaff relations and poor public relations may result. The key to formulating such a policy requires staff input. Recently, many schools have gone to a multi-level concept to partially meet skill needs of pupils reading below - at - and above grade level.

Together with the policy for use of basal and supplemental materials, there should be a policy that governs their storage and distribution. The principal who can provide the leadership in formulating workable and acceptable policies on the use of storage and distribution of basals

and supplemental reading materials is well on the way to an effective reading program.

SECOND, leadership in the selection of other instructional materials lies with the principal. It pays to be conservative in this age of commercialism in education. Today the market is flooded with all types of programs packaged in all colors of the rainbow which are guaranteed to teach pupils how to read. The good administrator must use caution - or money is wasted and teachers have a closet full of materials they neither want nor know how to use. Great care should be used in the selection and evaluation of these materials and wherever possible good teachers should be directly involved. Learner verification should be considered in the selections of new programs and materials.

We have found that materials and reading activities developed by the classroom teachers are superior to some that are commerical. Furthermore, they are more likely to meet individual needs of pupils. In-service activities for college credit in the development of Reading Skill Boxes have been very popular and worthwhile for our teachers.

The fifth and final area of responsibility that I will elaborate is that of public relations. I mention this last not because it does not have a high priority but because of its importance in education. We no longer can afford the luxury, (if it ever was) of confining all our efforts to teaching in isolation. We must foster good public relations and involve parents and the school community in the educational process. The principal who promotes the idea of "our" school and that we have an

on-going progressive reading program designed to meet individual needs of pupils will have the support of the community. An on-going and progressive reading program is one that not only places emphasis on the acquisition of basic reading skills but also on recreational and fun-type reading. The principal would do well to remember -- good reading programs place emphasis not only on pupils who can't read but on those pupils who can read but don't.

The principal can stimulate interest and support for a reading program by working closely with the PTA and/or school-community committee. Through them he can help to interpret the reading program. The mode for interpretation can take several forms. Often discussion groups using persons familiar with children's books can be arranged. The school librarian, a supervisor, or an outside consultant are some of the resource people who can help to stimulate parent groups. Book exhibits or book fairs may be held with these discussions, or at other times.

In working with parents the principal and staff should avoid giving too much time to details of methods. The purpose is not to make reading teachers out of parents. However, parents can make a contribution as volunteer tutors and should be welcomed in that capacity. The topic: "How you can help your child in reading" is always timely. Discussions on child development and how children learn are always pertinent. There are excellent films available for parent viewing to create better understanding. The tendency to reply to questions with technical terms -- structural analysis, word recognition, phonograms, phonetics, context clues, etc - should usually be avoided.

This position paper was prepared to stress the importance of the school principal in the reading program. As my thoughts were organized and in the presentation, my goal is to focus attention on the principal in a leadership role in improving reading instruction. To assume this role, you must be well informed about materials, methods of teaching, and an expert in the field of human relations. Good building administrators should plan to specialize in a curriculum area; and since reading skills are crucial to the education process, then I would strongly recommend the area of specialization be reading.

TODAY, more than ever it is a truism: "As is the principal, so goes the school!" I believe the point in this analogy will convey best the message I want to leave with you.

A young midwestern farm boy had as his idol his grandfather. After the corn crop had been "laid-by" the young man looked out across the waving field of corn and said: "You know, grandpa, you can sure make corn grow." "Son," the oldtimer said, "It's not in my power to make it grow, but I can create conditions under which is grows best."

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